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# Russia Under the Bolsheviks

By MARGUERITE E. HARRISON

Soviet Prisoner and Russian Correspondent for the Associated Press

THE motive that inspired my trip to Russia was the feminine trait of curiosity. I wanted to see what was going on there. I entered the country illegally after I had been turned down by the representative of the Soviet government in New York, crossing the Polish front and spending two weeks with the Red army, without the knowledge of the Moscow Foreign Office. In view of these facts, I richly deserved what happened to me.

During my stay of eighteen months I came into close contact with all kinds of men, leaders and others. I saw what was going on. I saw what the Bolsheviks were doing and what they were trying to do in Russia. I spent two weeks in the western provinces. I lived with the Red army and slept in peasants' houses, and I talked a great deal with the common people. Then I went to Moscow. When I reached there, I immediately began to act as a correspondent for the Associated Press and continued to do so for eight months. During that time I met many people of prominence. I also traveled through the heart of the present famine district. Then I went back to Moscow, and in October of last year I was arrested and put in prison where I stayed for ten months—for eight months in one of the most severe prisons in all Russia. I got myself into it and I have never blamed the Soviet government for what happened to me.

I came into Russia at a particularly interesting time, the first of February, 1920. At that time there was an unofficial armistice with Poland, and the Soviet government was hoping there

would be peace in the spring. As a result of this hope, there was a decidedly more liberal tendency among the Communist leaders. They had abolished the death penalty—by a decree issued on January 30, 1920. They had also deprived the Extraordinary Commission of its absolute powers and had declared that all political and counter-revolutionary cases should be brought before the revolutionary tribunals.

At this time, too, the various independent political parties in Russia were very active. The Mensheviks were publishing a bulletin, holding meetings, even securing members—and they were not interfered with. The same was true to a certain extent of the Social Revolutionaries, who are particularly strong among the peasant population. All these activities were more or less tolerated. There was not the atmosphere of repression and suspicion that I found later. This unusual liberality was due to the fact that the Soviet government had already made peace with Esthonia, and, as I said, expected to make peace with Poland. Its leaders were thinking more about economic reconstruction than repressive measures.

When the Polish offensive re-opened, the death penalty was put in force once more and the opposition political parties in Russia agreed to abandon all propaganda against the government during the period of hostilities. In addition, a number of Imperial Army officers entered the new army to fight against Poland. Among them was General Brusilov, with whom I was thrown much in contact during my stay in Moscow. During the Great

War he was in command of the Eighth Army, conducting the Galician offensive, and gained the only substantial successes made on the Russian front after the East Prussian advance in 1914. General Brusilov is inclined to favor a constitutional monarchy or a democracy of the French pattern for Russia, and yet he hated the Poles so much more than he did the Bolsheviks that he offered his services to the Soviet government. There were a number of others just like him, who, though out of sympathy with the Communists, were enthusiastic in coöperating with them against the Polish offensive.

So that is what intervention did in this case and what it has always done: it helped to consolidate and strengthen the military dictatorship of the Communist party, first, by arousing nationalist sentiment, and, second, by giving the Bolsheviks some justification for maintaining their system of repression and an excuse for their economic failures. The Polish invasion set back the evolution of the Revolution at least a year.

#### COMPLETE POLITICAL DOMINATION BY THE BOLSHEVIKS

When in Russia I attended various public meetings, among them those of the Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet and the annual convention of the Communist party. The Central Executive Committee is composed of two hundred men and is the real governing body of Russia. The All Russian Council of Soviets meets only twice a year and consequently many important matters must come before the Central Executive Committee, which issues all the decrees from the basis of the Soviet administration. The Communists, who are really a small fraction of the people and are a minority even among the Soviets themselves, have a most powerful party

machine. The following is an instance of their steam-roller methods.

The Central Executive Committee in May, 1920 was called on to consider Lord Robert Cecil's proposal to send an investigating commission to Russia. Before this proposition came up before the Committee, I talked to many of the more liberal Communists, who expressed themselves as being in favor of permitting the visit of the commission. Also there was a general sentiment among the non-partisans that it would be an excellent thing. When it was announced that this matter would be debated and that the public would be admitted, I went to the meeting, thinking it would be of great interest. Much to my surprise, out of the two hundred members of the Executive Committee there were only forty present. No one seemed to take any interest. The meeting did not begin until after seven, though it was scheduled for six o'clock. Finally Chicherin, Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, appeared on the platform and announced: "There has been a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist party and we have drawn up a reply to Lord Cecil's note for your approval." Those present held up their hands in obedient approval and the meeting was dismissed. The same thing was true of the meetings of the All Russian Council of the Soviets. Committees were formed. If they did not act as the leaders desired, they were dissolved and other committees formed—more obedient.

Organized labor in Russia is not by any means overwhelmingly pro-Bolshevik. Many trade union members are Social Revolutionaries and Anarchists, or belong to the Mensheviks, or minority faction of the Marxists. The Mensheviks were in majority last year in the Printers' Union. They struck; whereupon the union was promptly dissolved and reorganized with a major-

ity of Communists on its committees. There was the same tendency to party dictatorship in the All Russian Council of Trade Unions, which includes all the unions in Russia, twenty-three in number. It has an executive committee of fifteen members. In the spring of 1920 nine of those members were opposed to Trotzky's scheme of placing the factories under one-man control, and they were notified that they must change their policy. There was a very bitter dispute about it but it was done. These examples illustrate the complete political domination of the Bolsheviks. For this state of affairs, the blockade and intervention have been largely to blame. It would have been impossible if Russia had earlier been brought face to face with the problem of economic reconstruction; but continuous warfare has made it very easy for the Communist dictatorship to retain its hold.

I obtained a very clear idea of the trend of events in Russia from the character of the prisoners with whom I was thrown during my ten months in prison. Most of those people were not counter-revolutionists or spies, but Socialists. Nearly all important members of the opposition Socialist parties are at present put in prison because Lenin is not afraid of Cadets or Monarchists—those issues are dead in Russia—but he is afraid of the democratic and opposition Socialist elements. (I do not think there is any possibility of the reactionary government's ever coming back in Russia. It is very clear that the general trend of popular opinion is in favor of a democratic form of government with some Socialistic features.) There were a great many Anarchists, also, in prison with me last year. They are heartily hated by the Communists as opponents of bureaucratism and centralized government.

### THE SOVIET AND FORCES OF THE FUTURE

With all its faults, however, the Soviet government has filled a necessary function. It is an inevitable stage in the evolutionary process which is going on in Russia. I think if it should be abolished at the present time Russia might lapse into a state of anarchy, for the vast majority of the people are as yet unripe for representative government. One constructive piece of work being carried out by the Soviet government is the inauguration of a uniform system of universal compulsory education. This, I believe, will last under any government which may evolve out of the present situation. The Soviets are educating the people through the army and through a very wonderful public school system which will eventually give to every child in Russia a splendid education—and all absolutely free. They have got away from very many fads and unsound theories which they attempted to put into practice in the early days of the Revolution.

You will find that the peasants who are now being educated in Russia will soon begin to formulate distinct political opinions, something which they have never done up to the present time. When they learn what Communism stands for, they will immediately turn against the Soviet government because they want the possession of the land. As far as they are concerned they have abolished feudalism and gained the right to own their farms. This, to them, is what the Revolution represents and they will never favor any party with eventual nationalization of land as its goal.

Russia is now for the first time since 1914 face to face with the problems of post-war reconstruction. It will be impossible for many years for her to

build up her industries sufficiently to supply her own needs. Russia must rely for her future prosperity on the exploitation of her natural resources and agrarian production. It is very plain that when the time comes for Russia to settle down, whatever government there is must have the good will of the peasants. And no government which aims at abolishing all property rights will have that good will. At present these peasants are controlled by a military despotism, but I firmly believe if they receive support from the outside world, such as is coming from the American Relief Administration and from the re-opening of trade relations with other countries, they will be able, peacefully, to bring about radical political changes within the country. This is the opinion of thousands of Russians who are of no particular political party, and who have lived and suffered throughout the whole thing. You will find them in every administrative office in the government and they are almost unanimous in agreeing that it is better to let the Soviet government alone and Bolshevism will eventually disappear of its own accord. This is my own opinion and I think it is substantiated by the large majority of the intellectuals in Russia.

I have no space to give you any idea of what is going on in Russia in the way of normal life among the people, the wonderful theaters, the musicales, the workmen's theatrical clubs, and the interesting literary and artistic works that are being produced under enormous difficulties. The Soviet government encourages and appreciates all such movements and coöperates as far as possible with all who are doing constructive work in science, literature or art. In many cases much of

this work is being carried on by intellectuals who have long wanted to carry out certain theories and had no opportunity to do so under the Imperial government. This is particularly true of those engaged in educational experiments.

In Russia at the present time people are married and divorced very much as they are in any other country. In Moscow I went to a large church wedding with bridesmaids, best man and ushers, just as we have here. I attended a concert in the War Office, under the eye of Trotzky, which had been organized for the dependents of the employes. It was followed by a ball at which we danced till early morning. I went to meetings where groups of poets read their latest compositions. I found them delightful companions in spite of the fact that they were all living under material conditions that made life one long scramble for food, fuel and clothing. I also attended many delightful concerts, went on picnics during the summer, week-ended in peasant villages, went to art exhibitions, studio teas and many other pleasant social functions.

I cite these instances because I wish to point out that in spite of seven years of war, famine and suffering, the Russian people are still intensely vital, extraordinarily normal and able, if the other nations of the world will give them the chance, eventually to create for themselves, within their own country, a form of government which will retain the good and eliminate the evil brought about by the Revolution. But this end must be reached through an evolutionary process, and one of the most important factors in such an evolution will be ending the moral and physical isolation of Russia.